

# Bringing Up Baby

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Many of you may be faced with raising a baby buffalo or perhaps you have already attempted this. I will deal in this article only with the feeding and weaning of a calf. Part II will cover other aspects of raising a baby buffalo.

## Feeding

**Colostrum:** This is the first secretion from the udder of the cow just after calving; it precedes true lactation. I call it the "Drink of Life" as a calf will not live without it no matter how much antibiotic you try to give. Colostrum is a secretion containing mainly serum with antibodies and is nature's means of giving a calf immunity until the calf can develop its own immune system.

1) The greater the amount of immune globulins absorbed, the better are the chances of survival of the calf.

2) Absorption from the calf gut decreases from the time of birth and is insignificant after only 12 hours!!!

3) The optimal time for absorption is under 6 hours, the first hour or two being the very best.

4) The greater the amount of colostrum fed to the calf, the greater the amount of absorption. Try to get an orphan calf to take several frequent feedings of colostrum and let it have as much as it wants each time in the first 12 hours.

5) While the quality of colostrum may vary greatly from cow to cow, even poor quality colostrum is more valuable given early than high quality colostrum given several hours later.

There may be several reasons why you need to see to it that a calf gets colostrum and you now realize there is very little time, so be prepared:

a) Keep frozen colostrum on hand. Keep several gallons (depending on how many calves you expect). Frozen dairy colostrum is just fine for raising baby Bison and colostrum can be kept frozen from over a year. Contact a local dairy farm before spring calving season and ask them to save several gallons of their extra colostrum for you. Then remember to go pick it up. Dairymen usually charge a little for this service and sometimes they want you to bring in empty milk cartons. It should be frozen immediately and

when you thaw it out do not boil the milk or you may destroy the immune globulins. Thaw it out in hot water in the sink and then warm gently in the microwave or in a pan only the amount you are feeding. Keep the rest refrigerated for later feedings. I find that a new born buffalo may take 2 pints the very first feeding and want more an hour or two later. Feed several times in the first 12 hours.

b) Colostrum replacers are available in powdered form or freeze dried colostrum or colostrum boluses at vet and farm supply sources. These can be tubed or forced down the throat with a bolus gun, or reconstituted and bottle fed. I still like the frozen natural dairy colostrum the best.

c) Give a therapeutic injection of long acting, broad spectrum antibiotic. The stress and other unknown conditions that accompany an orphan calf call for this added measure.

While "the more the better" is the rule for colostrum the first twelve hours, it is not the rule for later feedings of milk and replacers. Overfeeding is a big problem with human moms and this causes scouring.

## Feeding Instructions

Day 1: Feed colostrum milk (frozen dairy or replacer) for the first 12 hours. Feed as much as the calf wants.

Day 2) Feeding Schedule - 2 or 3 feedings per day.

## Formula

Each Bottle: Mix 2 cups whole cow's milk, 1 egg (beaten), 1 cup of water. Feed this twice a day. If it is a very large calf or very hungry, give a little milk in 3 cups of water at noon.

Gradually increase the quantity of milk and decrease the water content. By 4 weeks old a calf will take: 8 cups of milk and 1 egg beaten for each bottle. Two bottles a day.

By 6 to 8 weeks old the calf will take milk or replacer to make 12 cups and 1 egg beaten for each bottle twice daily.

Always keep clean, cold water available.

Note: The egg gives the milk a higher protein content and is more like the high protein content of buffalo milk. It also helps to firm up the calf's stools. High protein baby cereal can

## Part I

be mixed with the milk but eggs are easier and better.

**Milk Replacers:** Replacers are available at the elevators and after the first two weeks can be used. They are usually loaded with antibiotics and thus I like to be sure there is no low grade infection in a calf before I start using a replacer. This is why I use whole cow's milk for two weeks. If the calf is healthy and no problems then switch over to a replacer gradually, some replacer, some milk. Take 3 or 4 days to switch over and then gradually increase the quantity of replacer as tolerated. Actually replacers are better than milk. They are usually fortified with vitamins and other minerals.

## Start on Grain

After a few days start putting a handful or two of calf feed in the calf's mouth as it wants to suck on your fingers.

Also put some grass or hay in its mouth. Just a little each time you finish giving it a bottle. This will teach it what to eat and get it started early on feed. While the digestive system of a calf will not be able to utilize this feed for a couple of months, it will still be getting an early start. Calf Manna, Kent Feeds, Walnut Grove all have good calf formations. Check with your local elevator.

Any time you take a calf off milk before 7 months, be sure to add calcium supplement to solid feed or the calf will seem stunted. Bone structure will not develop as rapidly as if given milk and feed. Prepared feeds do not seem to have enough calcium. As well as adding vitamin, mineral supplement, I also add extra calcium to all my creep feeds.

Be sure to find out what mineral deficiencies your area has and add that supplement to your feed formulation.

## Weaning

At about 3 months you should notice that the calf is eating grain without your feeding it and at this time you can start weaning if you want. I usually back off of the morning and evening feeding of milk by about 4 cups. The calf will feel hungry and eat more feed. After another month I will

back off the bottle by another 4 cups each feeding or simply back off one of the two bottles depending on how the calf gets grain. If the calf has to come up to the feeder and compete with other buffalo for feed you need to stay with the calf twice a day while it eats so you can be sure it gets enough feed, especially if pastures are short. If the calf has a creep area for only small calves or if the calf is penned by itself and can always get grain without being afraid of a pecking order then you do not need to stay with it while eating the grain. You can wean it earlier.

At 6 or 7 months you probably are getting mauled and are feeding the calf over the gate and you could then stop the bottle feeding. Be sure to supplement feed with extra calcium at this time. Or you may be using the bottle to lead the calf around and in that case I bottle fed my first bull until he was nearly two years old. Everyone laughed but it got the bull in the squeeze chute for two years. Note: It was also dangerous to be seen with a bottle in hand. It is really best to wean a buffalo at about 5 to 6 months.

Caution: It is time to mention here that bottle raising a baby buffalo may seem cut but it is not the job for a small

child. That calf can kick and charge from the first minute it stands up and within a day or two it can butt hard enough to knock some of your teeth out. Don't send your young kids out unless they really know livestock and are large enough to protect themselves. Don't lean your head down over the calf's head to give it a hug. That is how you lose your teeth. Don't stand in front of a calf and feed it a bottle.

## Research Targets Bison Increase

*Reprinted from AgWeek,  
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Bison, a beast out of the past, has a place in America's future. So says a group of Wyoming scientists and ranchers who plan to breed bison using cattle as surrogate mothers.

"We see there is nowhere the number of bison for the demand," says Paul Butler, manager of the group called Livestock Research and Innovation. "In order to make any type of dramatic increase, you've got to use the new techniques."

With help from the University of Wyoming, researchers have been artificially inseminating female bison

Stand beside it, train it this way because in a month or two when it starts butting and jumping at the near empty bottle, you don't want to be in the way. Steel toed boots are good and you may want an entire football uniform by the time you wean the calf. If you tie and halter break a calf you may tie it during feeding. I usually leave mine with the herd or keep it free in with beef calves.

treated with hormones. Then the fertilized embryos are flushed out of the bison and implanted in cattle, allowing bison cows to produce more embryos without waiting to give birth themselves.

So far the surrogate cows have rejected all implanted bison embryos, but University of Wyoming animal science professor Gary Moss says he's sure it can be done.

At the end of the last century, bison were on the brink of extinction, but now are multiplying slowly, number from 80,000 to 100,000.

And as their numbers grow, the animals are finding a place in the meat market.

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